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ABSTRACT

Ways in which social studies teachers can help students in grades 6, 7, and 8 improve their reading comprehension and understanding of social studies ideas and concepts are discussed, and sample reading comprehension activities are provided. First, teachers must choose a textbook with readability and concept levels appropriate for their students. But the teacher's role extends beyond that of text selection; he or she must bring the student to an understanding of the concepts located within the textbook. This can be done by teaching students important vocabulary terms, relating the material to the student's experience, guiding reading to provide support (e.g., asking students to find the main idea of a paragraph), and providing reading experiences to reinforce the concepts. Sample activities which can be used to develop social studies concepts are provided in the appendices. They can be modified for use with different grade levels or textbooks. The activities include acrostics, an unscrambling word exercise, spelling games, a reading selection and a worksheet that serves as a reading guide, and a worksheet that asks students to develop test questions based on chapter headings. (RM)

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Increasing Junior High School Students' Social Studies Concept Attainment Through Reading Comprehension Activities

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ABSTRACT

Activities to increase junior high school students' social studies concept attainment through reading comprehension were compiled. Kerber's four-stages of concept attainment (Nelson, 1978) were used as a guide for selection of activities. These four stages include: 1) teaching vocabulary, 2) delving into student's experience, 3) guiding reading, and 4) providing activities to reinforce learned concepts. The reading comprehension activities focus on vocabulary and comprehension worksheets, on making inferences, on teacher-directed activities, and textbook extensions. A survey of selected literature defined concept learning as words that define relationships between social studies ideas (Reyes & Smith, 1983), or simply the underlying constructs of the social sciences. Reading comprehension was defined as a more encompassing version of concept learning, according to studies by Durkin (1978-79). The activities were selected to aid classroom teachers in stimulating student concept attainment.

Increasing Junior High School Student's Concept Attainment Through Reading Comprehension Activities

The purpose of this study is to provide activities that improve junior high school students' understanding of social studies concepts through reading. In her 1978-79 research in social studies, Durkin said that the elementary classrooms she viewed were dull, factually-oriented places which emphasized ditto worksheet learning. Since reading is essential in the teaching of social studies on the junior high level, I surveyed literature to seek current information on reading in social studies. The activities which I selected for this study are a result of my survey. This study will examine the role of the textbook in social studies, the definition of a social studies concept, and in that context the definition of reading comprehension, the teacher's choice of a social studies textbook, the presentation of a social studies lesson, and finally various comprehension related skills. The end result , for me, is a more exciting classroom.

Most instruction in social studies in the junior high school level (6th, 7th, and 8th grades) involves, to some degree or another, a textbook. In

my experience, they have been hard cover books with material to last through a year of school. In variations, there are softbound books, worktexts, and/or workbooks that also accompany hard-cover textbooks. There is great variety in the subject matter covered, but some reappearing themes are: U.S. history, geography, world cultures, world history, sociology,economics and philosophy.

Textbooks are used because of the wide variety and scope of the material covered in a school year. The most expedient way to present the information is in textbook form. It lends itself to be read in an independent mode by students, and it can be used as a starting point for discussion and for review or assessment.

Expediency is not, however, the goal of having a textbook. The goal is to have the student be in contact with information about social studies and to learn from the text the underlying ideas. The underlying, or overall meanings are called concepts. Lundstrom (1976) quotes Smith as calling "Concept learning...the method by which we direct our mental operations and channel them towards the solution of the problem confronting us." Reyes, and Smith (1983) define concepts as "words that represent classes of situations, phenomena or relationships central to an

understanding of the social sciences."

The basic ideas of social studies learning (ie. cooperation, money systems, community membership) are developed by having the students read examples of these concepts, and generalize to the main or larger picture. At primary levels students might be introduced to the concept of community membership. By examining the jobs of police and fireman and how these helpers serve the community, a student learns that a community offers assistance to its members. By 7th grade the student learns the elections laws, and studies the idea of participatory government, in other words, a government run with the approval of its citizens. The concepts become more sophisticated, and so does the accompanying text material.

The importance of this explanation is twofold: 1) Much of the material in social studies is printed material to be read. Reading comprehension is highly important. 2) A student is reading to understand not only what is read but to get a mental picture of an underlying concept.

Lundstrom (1976) in his study of high school students also states that one of the problems confronting educators is that students read

poorly. Because of this he states only about 13% of the class time is spent reading. It can be concluded that students need to improve their reading to improve their understanding of social studies ideas.

Teachers can help students to read social studies material with greater understanding. The first teacher decision is that of textbook selection. The textbook needs to be geared to students' level. Choosing material to meet student needs is a difficult decision. A third grade class will have a reading range of between a year and two years. And this gap in ability increases as students grow older. By high school, the range may be 7-9 years or more. Readability formulas give a starting place to assess the usability of a certain text. It is unwise however to match a book to the reading achievement level of students because readability formulas have some failings. Namely they can't account for the range of differences of a particular passage, don't tell the complexity of a particular passage, nor do they tell how densely concepts are packed on the page of material (Nelson, 1978). Nelson concludes that social studies texts, like other school books are not meant to be read independently by students. They are teaching tools, meant to be read under the directed guidance of a teacher. The textbook selection process should keep this in

mind.

How densely concepts appear in the text material should be of very great importance to a teacher looking at the difficulty of material. Reyes & Smith (1983) say readability formulas are often incapable of measuring how often concepts appear. Counting the number of syllables and length of sentences, as readability formulas do, does not necessarily reflect how difficult the ideas are in a passage. The degree to which concepts are contained in a passage is called concept loading (Reyes & Smith, 1985). Many concepts packed into a small number of paragraphs may assume a reader has already had experience with some of these ideas. The following example from a high school textbook illustrates how a passage can be laden with ideas without providing definitions of concepts.

> Business people. By 1870 business people rather than politicians were the real leaders of the country. Not simply merchants, they were organizers, promoters, risktakers, and managers. And they had a more flexible form of business organization at their command. The old-time merchants had employees working for them and perhaps a partner or two. But to expand their operations, they has to risk their

own fortunes, and if things went bad, they might find themselves penniless.

Reyes & Smith (1983) provided this example from the textbook, We the People. This passage assumes knowledge of the concept of business leader, politican, organizer of business operations, and economics, yet no definitions are given. Much prior student knowledge is assumed. Reyes & Smith (1983) state that teachers need to look at the number of concepts and be aware when choosing texts of the number of concepts and the difficulty of the concepts.

The teacher's role extends beyond that of text selection, he/she must bring the student to an understanding of the concepts located within the text. Kerber (Nelson, 1978) suggests this be done by a) teaching students important vocabulary terms, b) touching base with the students' experience, c) guiding reading to provide support, and d) providing post reading experiences to reinforce the learned concept.

Durkin (1978-79) in her 300 hours of elementary school classroom observation says that students and teachers do not seem to enter the realm of understanding or comprehension instruction. In her observations of elementary school social studies, no comprehension

instruction was seen- rather assessment through interrogation was the common practice. Teachers, in the classes she observed seemed mainly concerned with covering content and having the students master facts. It was noted too that a great deal of time was spent on dittoed seatwork, and that the focus of lessons frequently was to complete seatwork. The instruction in comprehension concepts was a missing element in the observed classrooms. Although the teachers were consciencious, students were not being instructed in comprehension.

Durkin suggests teachers need more instruction in understanding the reading process. In reanalyzing Kerber's suggestions, a framework by which to teach reading comprehension can be devised. The first of these techniques focus on teaching vocabulary. Concepts are often contained in the language of the text, especially in the vocabulary of the social studies discipline. One of the teacher's initial goals would be to have the student recognize and learn the vocabulary of the lesson. This is commonly done before the lesson itself is presented. Vocabulary is closely tied to the idea of learned concepts. Activities to teach vocabulary include teaching students that there are key vocabulary ideas, called terms (Hantula, 1982). Vocabulary can also be presented in word scrambles, crossword

puzzles, and analysis of word prefixes, suffixes and root words. Students can learn to spell vocabulary words (Guttinger, 1977), and use vocabulary words in sentences.

The second step of Kerber's process is relating the material to the student's experience. This is an important step in teaching comprehension. If experiential background is missing, it must be provided. For example, if the concept of imperialism is being taught, the teacher may ask students to "list where school supplies can be obtained." This puts the idea of seeking material into the scope of the student's experience. By enlarging the question to , "If no materials were found in the typical location where would you then look?" a teacher encourages students to problem solve and to analyze the situation, again from the realm of the student's own experiences.

Kerber's third step directly precedes the actual entry to the printed page. When material is being read, guided reading questions will help the student read for meaning and thus know what to look for in the text. By asking students to find and relate the main idea of a paragraph, chose the main or topic sentence, and summarize in their own words, we are asking for comprehension level skills. Here , the textbook information is

presented to the students. The teacher, in turn, must help them interpret, analyze, and come to some conclusions about the material.

Finally, after the concepts have been read and comprehended, Kerber's 4th step is developing further examples to follow up the learned concept. Items supporting the concept can be listed and discussed. Reyes & Smith (1983) say textbooks are lax because they frequently don't have enough examples. Klausmeier and Feldman's (1975) research showed that 4th graders learned better when 3 examples were given, more so than 1 or 2 examples. Pictures can be found by students which illustrate the concept (Smith & Smith, 1983), students can make bulletin boards which further demonstrate an idea, students can summarize their learning in writing and so forth. These activities enhance student comprehension because they make students more than interpreters, they make them reinterpreters. This is an important step in comprehension. When students can actually name, discriminate, and tell what the attributes of a concept are, they have reached the final or formal level of concept attainment. (Klausmeier & Feldman, 1975).

Because junior high students demonstrate a range of skills in social studies, there is overlap between it, and other disciplines. The last

section of the study will list social studies skills which can be used in other school subjects, and/or as life skills.

Hantula (1982) lists 6 areas in which social studies skills are shared with other subjects. He includes locating information, evaluating information, interpreting information, organizing information, communicating information, and working with others. Harris and Sipay (1980) have a similar list of study skills, which they call functional reading. These skills correspond to Hantula's list with the addition of comprehension of technical vocabulary and material selection.

I want to emphasize two other areas that Harris lists under a category called comprehension skills. One is following printed directions, which I believe is a valuable tool for life skills. Lastly Harris cites critical reading skills. By developing the ability to think critically, students can derive ideas and points of view from the textbook. All of these help them understand social studies, themselves, and others (Hantula, 1982).

Social studies concepts are mainly embodied in the reading in the text. One way junior high school students will be able to generalize to the larger social studies concepts is by understanding what is written. Teachers need to further their own skills in seeking greater reading

comprehension by students. (Durkin, 1978-79). Teachers also need to choose texts keeping in mind student interest and reading ability, yet recognizing that much of the text material needs to have the skilled guidance of the teacher. Kerber's 4 step model for teaching reading comprehension (Nelson, 1978) seems to be a workable model. The four steps are a) teaching vocabulary, b) touching base with a student's experience, c) guiding reading to give students direction for their reading, and, d) providing activities after reading to support and reinforce the concepts that have been learned.

Many other activities are available. Those appended here provide a starting point for a classroom teacher. Textbooks themselves provide a variety of activities.

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Appendix

The appendix contains activities to be used to develop social studies concepts. These activities can be modified for use with different grade levels or textbooks.

Vocabulary

Social Studies Terms

Social Studies terms are words which have special meaning for social studies. In a textbook social studies terms are usually printed in bold type or italics. Furthermore, definitions of social studies terms are usually given in a glossary placed at the end of the textbook. The glossary is used as a reference for defining social studies terms. A definition of a social studies term describes its special meaning and may note an example.

Examples of Social Studies terms:

transportation	turnpike	cooperation
technology	immigrants	process
cooperation	canal	ancient times
tools	economics	systems
government	law	latitude
time line	resources	industry
wages	standard	organizations
nationalism	federal system	democracy
farming	rural	religion
language	custom	individualism
dependence	rights	communication
sharing	melting pot	cultural difference
traditions	evaluation	social awareness
lifestyles	goals	tools
synthesis	standards	work ethic
opinion	fact	analysis
revolution	groups	identity

(Hantula, 1983)

Vocabulary

Suggested Classroom Activity

Directions to students:

Circle the social studies terms in the sentences below. Determine if the statements are true or false. Mark a + if the statement is true. Mark a 0 if the statement is false.

_____1. Pericles stated that if people did not want to take part in the government of the city-state , they had no purpose there.

_____2. Pasion was able to become a citizen through his work as a banker.

_____3. The ancient Greeks are famous for their love of beauty. This shows in the style of their architecture.

_____4. A boy might be trained at the gymnasium in wrestling and running.

_____5. The words tragedy and comedy, have Greek origins. They refer to types of plays or drama.

List the circled words here. Define each word by using a glossary. Then write each definition in your own words and give an example illustrating the term.

Word	Glossary definition	Definition (own words)	Example
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Vocabulary

Acrostics

This is a very enjoyable activity and one that is easy to compose.

Accrostics encourage vocabulary usage and correct spelling.

_C_ ___	1. time of the cave dwellers
U	
____L_	2. sharp tool for cutting grain
__T__________	3. person who studies cultures
U	
____R	4. tool of the cave dwellers
_E__	5. group of animals
A	
N	
D	
E_____	6. major change in lifestyle
N	
V	
I____	
R	
O__	7. used to weave cloth by early farmers
N	
M__	8. people of the Kalahari
E	
N	
T	9. Hard, black rock used for starting fires

Vocabulary

Unscrambles

This is another enjoyable activity for exposing students to new vocabulary or reviewing vocabulary for a test. Here is a sample of this kind of class activity.

1. peneerce	the chief protested about reservation policy to the government
2. icmtycjalane	an "Old West" entertainer who told tales of riding with Wild Bill Hickok, and being a Pony Express rider
3. srepsfaejer	in a constant struggle with the cattle farmers for grazing land
4. aheehoslilttuonteprie	famous story by L. Ingalls Wilder of a young girl's life on the new frontier
5. sitligntbui	Indian leader, famous for his action against Custer
6. pssoexenpry	mail carrying system

Vocabulary

Spelling Social Studies Terms

The more familiar that students are with social studies terms, the greater the chances they will use them. Activities using social studies terms in a gamelike format are fun and are an alternative way to present terms.

Directions to the teacher: Choose terms from your textbook. Divide the words into 3 classes of difficulty: $.05, $.10, and $.15. Put the students in the class onto two or three teams. Students choose the value catagory that they wish to spell. Add the value of the correctly spelled word to the team's score. If a player misspells a word, is it not necessary to sit down, but the team does not add that value to its final total.

$.05	$.10	$.15
plow	reaper	cooperation
canal	transportation	internal
turnpike	pioneer	improvements
cabin	steamboat	Appalachians
water	immigrants	Mississippi
supply	westward	Lincoln
public	population	neutrality
treaty	domain	precedent
land	expansion	

(Guttinger, 1977)

Guiding Reading

Determining the Important Facts

Important facts are facts which require written notes after reading an assignment. Important facts are often indicated by a title, an introduction, boldface print, a summary or questions. In addition, important facts can be determined by devising questions to be answered from the assisnment. By answering questions students can more easily recall the facts for future use. Questions developed from the facts can be used to review before a class discussion or test. There is a text selection here, and a worksheet on the following page. (Hantula, 1983)

The Middle Ages: Periods of history

Cellarius wrote books in Latin. One of his books, Modern History, came out in 1696. It told the story of Europe from 1453 to his own time. Cellarius also wrote two other histories. He called one Ancient History. It told of events before A.D. 337. The other book was a history of the period between ancient and modern times. He called this book History of the Middle Ages. We have continued to use Cellarius's labels for these perios of history, but not all people who study history agree with the dates Cellarius picked.

(Cooper, K. (1984). The World and Its People: Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett.)

The worksheet on the following page will serve as a reading guide.

Guiding Reading

A Worksheet for Determining the Important Facts

Directions to students:

Circle the important facts included in the paragraph on the preceding page. Determine if the following statements are true or false. Make a T if the statement is true. Mark a n F if the statement is false.

_____1. There are several important facts in the paragraph.

_____2. Two important facts are indicated by boldface print.

_____3. The title describes what is included in the paragraph.

_____4. An introduction and summary are included in the paragraph.

_____5. The important facts in the paragraph can be written on one piece of paper.

From the preceding article note 5 important facts. Write them here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Devise three questions about the article or chapter. Write the questions and answers below.

Questions	Answers
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

(Hantula, 1983)

Reinforcing Learned Concepts

Headings and Subheadings

The teacher can develop a worksheet based on the chapter outline of headings and subheadings. The students are assigned to groups of four or five. The purpose of the groups is to develop questions based on the chapter headings. One student in the group acts as the recorder and writes the responses of the others in the group. Each recorder reports to the class and a composite list of questions is constructed.

(Guttinger, 1977)

Sample Worksheet for Students

The job of your group will be to play the role of the teacher. You are to construct questions for a test on the unit. Think of a question that you would ask relating to each step of the outline. Write your questions in the space provided.

Nature and People in Western Europe _____

I. A Most Favorable Climate _____

A. Strabo's geography _____

1. Strabo's idea _____

2. Europe's resources _____

B. Western and Eastern Europe _____

1. Europe since World War II _____

2. Eastern Europe _____

3. Western Europe _____

(Cooper, K. (1984). The World and Its People: Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett.)

Activities to Reinforce Learned Concepts

Seek and Find

The teacher identifies a concept to be taught (ie. people live in different kinds of homes, industry has lessened the demand for skilled labor, etc.) Pictures are then selected which substantiate the concept. These are glued on the tagboard sheet.

Students are assigned to teams of 4-5. Each team is given a tagboard concept sheet. Each team is asked to think of a title and a statement is printed on the strip of construction paper.

(Guttinger, 1977)

Reinforcing Learned Concepts

Recognizing Patterns of Organization

An important skill is catagorizing or making a determination about where factors fit into a process. By helping students see how factors relate to the whole, we are assisting in thought development, and logical thinking skills. The following worksheet uses information from a chapter, and asks students to sort it to show they understand the factors of industrialization.

Student Worksheet

Factors of Industrialization

Here are the factors of industrialization:

Put a "C" before those statements relating to capitol.

Put an "N" before those statements which are natural resources.

Put a "T.S." before those statements which refer to technological skills.

Put a "T" before those statements relating to transportation.

Put an "L" before those statements relating to labor.

Put a "B" before those statements relating to business ability.

_____1. immigrants

_____2. railroads

_____3. Bessemer process

_____4. Andrew Carnegie

_____5. canals

_____6. knowledge of economics

_____7. stocks

_____8. raw materials

9_____surplus capitol

10_____ .trade unionism

11_____invention of the air brake

12_____strike breakers

13_____Board of Directors

14_____coal, iron ore

15_____A.F. of L.

16_____Samuel Gompers